



THE

# Hungarian Historical Review

NEW SERIES OF ACTA HISTORICA  
ACADEMIÆ SCIENTIARUM HUNGARICÆ

*Ethnonyms in Europe and Asia:  
Studies in History and Anthropology*

VOLUME **7** NUMBER **I**  
**2018**

Institute of History, Research Centre for the Humanities,  
Hungarian Academy of Sciences

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Supported by the HUNGARIAN ACADEMY OF SCIENCES (HAS) and  
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INDEXED/ABSTRACTED IN: CEEOL, EBSCO, EPA, JSTOR, MATARKA, Recensio.net.



Institute of History  
Research Centre for the Humanities,  
Hungarian Academy of Sciences  
H-1097 Budapest, Tóth Kálmán utca 4.  
[www.hunghist.org](http://www.hunghist.org)  
HU ISSN 2063-8647



# The Hungarian Historical Review

New Series of Acta Historica  
Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae

Volume 7 No. 1 2018

## *Ethnonyms in Europe and Asia: Studies in History and Anthropology*

Zsuzsanna Zsidai  
Special Editor of the Thematic Issue

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## Magyar – A Name for Persons, Places, Communities

### György Szabados

*Consulting Historian, King Saint Stephen Museum, Székesfehérvár/Director of László Gyula Institute*

With a name, we identify a community. But if we consider how people assigned and used names in the early Middle Ages, we are confronted with limits and problems. On the one hand, communities were organized in several ways, and the different kinds of identities (e.g. person, state, clan, ethnic group) can be confusing and thus can be confused. On the other hand, the history of a name and the object it denotes can lead in different directions: a name could identify more peoples or groups, and conversely, a single ethnic group could have many denominations. “Magyar” is now the vernacular name of the Hungarians who first emerged as a distinct group in the ninth century, but this noun appeared much earlier and not in a group-identifying function. Around the year 530, a Kutrigur-Hunnic king lived who was mentioned as “Muageris” by Byzantine authors. Some scholars have observed the similarity between the name “Muageris” and the ethnonym “Magyar.” Another Byzantine work (*De Administrando Imperio* ca. 950) enumerates the “clan of Meger” among the “Turk” [Hungarian] clans, and centuries later the Hungarian gestas and chronicles mention “Hetumoger,” “het Mogor” as “seven Hungarians.” If one compares the Byzantine sources with internal sources, it is possible that King “Muageris” can be inserted into the frame of the written data. The noun “Magyar” had four coherent functions. It was used as 1) a personal name, “Muageris” and “Magor,” the latter of whom was one of the forefathers of the Hungarians according to their original ethnic myth; 2) a toponym for the ancient homeland, i.e. the Hungarian chronicles use “Magor” for “Scythia” or “Magoria” to refer to part of “Scythia”; 3) the name of one of the leading clans, the clan of “Meger”; and 4) an ethnic name, i.e. “Hetumoger” or “het Mogor” as ‘seven Hungarians’.

Keywords: Hungarian ethnonym, functions of the name “Magyar”, king Muageris, medieval historiography

### *Introduction*

To name a community is to identify it, or at least to try to identify it. But if we examine the processes of naming in the early Middle Ages, we are confronted with many limits and problems.<sup>1</sup> On the one hand, communities were organized in several ways, and the different kinds of identities (whether one belongs to

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1 See e.g. Sinor, “Reflections on the History and Historiography,” 3–14; Pohl and Mehofer, *Archaeology of Identity*.

a state, a clan, or an ethnic group) can often be confused.<sup>2</sup> For instance, the inhabitants of the Avar Khaganate, i.e. the state or the steppe-empire of the Avars, were not automatically parts of the Avar ethnic community,<sup>3</sup> as many immigrating groups had been integrated under Avar rule in the Carpathian Basin during the existence of the aforementioned khaganate (568–ca. 822).<sup>4</sup> On the other hand, the history of a name and its denoted object can lead in different directions, since one name could identify several peoples and, conversely, several names could be used to denote a single ethnic group.

Why was a single ethnic group referred to by different names in the texts? The pool of authors was so strikingly diverse from the perspectives of the eras in which they lived, their origins (where they lived), and their literacy (cultural/religious determinations) that the various names do not form one big organic logical system; only “subsystems” can be revealed in different sources. The following examples illustrate the divergences among and diversity of the ethnonyms. Emperor Leo VI of Byzantium (886–912) enumerates the Turks [Hungarians] among the “Scythian nations” (Σκυθικὰ ἔθνη).<sup>5</sup> Leo’s son Emperor Constantine VII (913–959), in his compiled didactic work (*De Administrando Imperio*), registered an older ethnic name.

The nation of the Turks [Hungarians] (Τούρχων ἔθνος) had of old dwelling next to Chazaria, in the place called Lebedia after the name of their first voivode, which voivode was called by the personal name of Lebedias, but in virtue of his rank was entitled voivode, as have been the rest after him. Now in this place, the aforesaid Lebedia, there runs a river Chidmas, also called Chingilous. They were not called Turks (Τούρχοι) at that time but had the name *Sabartoi asphaloi* (Σάβαρτοι ἄσφαλοι), for some reason or other.<sup>6</sup>

In the first part of the tenth century two other important sources presented the diversity of the terms used to designate ethnicities. The *Annals of Fulda* revealed

2 See e.g. Pohl, Gantner, and Payne, *Visions of Community*; Szabados, “Identitásformák és hagyományok,” 289–305.

3 Pohl, “A non-Roman Empire,” 571–95.

4 Szádeczky-Kardoss, “The Avars,” 206–28; Szőke, *The Carolingian Age*, 9–43.

5 Dennis, *The Taktika of Leo VI*, 452–53. Although the text of his *Taktika* is mainly based on *Strategikon*, which was probably written by Emperor Maurikios (582–602), *Taktika* is a useful source on Hungarian history in the ninth and tenth centuries, as Emperor Leo VI supplemented the basic text with contemporary data. Dennis, *Das Strategikon des Maurikios*.

6 Moravcsik, *Constantine Porphyrogenitus, De Administrando Imperio*, vol. 1, 170–71.

an “overwriting” process speaking of “Avars, who are called Hungarians” (*Avāri, qui dicuntur Ungari*).<sup>7</sup> On the other hand, two Muslim authors, Ibn Rusta and Gardīzī, assert that “The Magyars are a race of Turks...”<sup>8</sup> One could enumerate further examples, but these cases clearly demonstrate that it is impossible to build one big logical system of Hungarian ethnonyms. However, Gyula László may well have offered a convincing answer to the question with which I began this paragraph. Since the Hungarians appeared as Magyars, Onogurs, Bashkirs, Turks, Savartoi, or Savards, etc. in the sources, at one time all these names were understood as referring to a single ethnic entity, the Magyars, but it is highly likely that they (the Magyars) emerged from a fusion of peoples which earlier had separate identities.<sup>9</sup> In order to approach at least one subsystem of possible correlations of names and the named, one must invert the question and ask not “how many names can be used for one people,” but rather “how many meanings belong to one name.”

### *The Meanings of “Magyar”*

The Hungarians who called themselves Magyars in their own vernacular can be differentiated first in the ninth century, but this noun was used much earlier and not in a group-identifying function. When three authors, namely Johannes Malalas († after 570), Theophanes the Confessor (†817), and Georgios Kedrenos (mid-eleventh century) discuss the political relations of the Eastern Roman Empire with its neighbours, their chronicles report on an internal struggle among the Huns in the Black Sea region during the first imperial year of Justinian I (527–565). Although Johannes Malalas lived earlier, the text-tradition of his work is more problematic than Theophanes’ *Chronographia* (Malalas’ chronicle survived in later and corrupted texts, and especially from the aspects of the onomastic data: the forms of the foreign names are not reliable), and it is worth reading Theophanes’ version of the incident. Kedrenos compiled his *Synopsis* from the *Chronographia*, so this is another reason to turn to Theophanes.<sup>10</sup>

In the same year [527/528 AD], the king of the Huns near Bosphoros, called Gordas, joined the emperor, became Christian, and was baptized.

7 *Annales Fuldenses*, 125; *The Annals of Fulda*, 140.

8 Macartney, *The Magyars in the Ninth Century*, 206.

9 László, *The Magyars*, 54.

10 Moravcsik, “Muagerisz király,” 261–65.



The emperor received him, provided him with many gifts, and sent him back to his own country to guard Roman territory and the city of Bosphoros... After the king of the Huns, who had become a Christian, returned to his own country, he found his brother and told him of the emperor's love and liberality and that he had become a Christian. He then took the statues that the Huns worshipped and melted them down, for they were made of silver and electrum. Enraged, the Huns united with his brother, went away and killed Gordas and made his brother Mouageris king in his place. Then, in the fear that the Romans might seek him out, they fell suddenly on the city of Bosphoros and killed the tribune Dalmatius and his soldiers. At this news the emperor sent out the ex-consul John the grandson of John the Scythian and son of the patrician Rufinus, with a large Scythian force, and at the same time directed against the Huns Godilas... and the general Badourios. On hearing this, the Huns fled and disappeared.<sup>11</sup>

The texts contain the *Οὔννοι* ethnonym and the versions of the king's name as follows: *Μοῦγγελ* (Johannes Malalas), *Μουαγέρην* (Theophanes), and *Μοαγέσα* (Georgios Kedrenos).<sup>12</sup> Since the second half of the nineteenth century, scholars have debated whether the name of this person is in close connection with the “Magyar” ethnonym;<sup>13</sup> in his philological analysis, Gyula Moravcsik gives an answer to this question which is rather “more” than “less” positive. He also defines these Huns as Kutrigurs and emphasizes the relation with another Byzantine source concerning a people who must have been the Hungarians.<sup>14</sup>

In his didactic compilation, the so-called *De Administrando Imperio*, after telling of how the Kabars were defeated by the Chazars and joined the Hungarians, Emperor Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus enumerates the leading clans of the “Turks” [Hungarians] in the following manner (ca. 950):

“The first is the aforesaid clan (*γενεά*) of the Kabaroi, which split off from the Chazars; the second, of Nekis; the third, of Megeris (*Μεγέρη*); the fourth, of Kourtogermatos; the fifth, of Tarianos; the sixth, Genach; the seventh, Kari; the eighth, Kasi.”<sup>15</sup>

11 *The Chronicle of Theophanes Confessor*, 267.

12 *Ioannis Malalae Chronographia*, 432; *Theophanis Chronographia*, 269–70; *Georgius Cedrenus Ioannis Scylitzae Ope*, 645.; Moravcsik, *Byzantinoturcica*, 192–93.

13 In support of this connection e.g. Szabó, *Kisebb történeti munkái* vol. 1, 155–56; Moravcsik, *Muagerisz*, 259–60; Idem, *Byzantinoturcica* vol 2, 192–93. Against it e.g. Róna-Tas, *Hungarians and Europe in the early Middle Ages*, 297–98.

14 Moravcsik, *Muagerisz*, 271.

15 *De Administrando Imperio*, 174–75.

It is worth noting that in this context the *De Administrando Imperio* uses the meaning “the clan of Megyer” instead of “the clan [called] Megyer,” therefore a genitive structure of the noun and the clan demonstrates a closer denominating relation; otherwise a “clan Megyer” could mean a distant and an institutionalized connection within the phrase.

Several times in the history of the Eurasian Steppe, the name of a ruler became the name of a community (clan, folk, empire), e.g. Seljuq, Nogai, Osman, and Chagatai.<sup>16</sup> These examples are important from the perspective of this discussion, because they prove that the *person* → *group* system of naming was part of this wide cultural “commonwealth.” It is more important, however, to examine the Hungarian sources containing the occurrences (and the types of occurrences) of the proper noun “Magyar.”

First, the most important features of early Hungarian history must be summarized briefly, because the age of the surviving texts does not necessarily inform us of the first recorded use of the term. Several times, earlier texts contain secondary data or secondary (perhaps transcribed, misunderstood) versions of a story, and later codices sometimes contain the more original variation of a concrete component of the ancient tradition.<sup>17</sup>

The basic and most detailed narrative of the mythical and historical past is found only in the text which was written in the Angevin Era. The first chapter of this chronicle reveals unambiguously the fact of the earlier histories, as well:

In the year of our Lord MCCCLVIII on the Tuesday of the week of His ascension [15 of May in 1358] this chronicle was begun concerning the deeds of the Hungarians in ancient and most recent times, whence they came and how they fared, their victories and their bravery, compiled from diverse old chronicles, preserving what in them is true and utterly refuting what is false.<sup>18</sup>

Thus, this chronicle was compiled on the basis of several older works. The reconstruction of the older texts contains details of which we remain uncertain because when the continuation (in which the original version is changed, misunderstood, and reinterpreted) was finished, the earlier texts were no longer extant. Its earliest source was the so-called *Ancient Gesta*, which has not survived, but its existence has been verified, and its text has been partially reconstructed on

16 Golden, *An Introduction to the History of the Turkic Peoples*, 6.

17 E.g. see Szabados, “On the origin-myth of Álmos Great Prince,” 437–42.

18 Dercsényi, *The Hungarian Illuminated Chronicle*, 89.

the basis of a comparison of the available sources. The first *Gesta* was continued several times by unknown authors during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. According to the most persuasive theory, the *Ancient Gesta* was made during the reign of King Andrew I (1046–60), and Bishop Nicholas, who appears in Chapter 90, was its author.<sup>19</sup> There is a wide divergence of the opinion among scholars concerning the phases and authors between the eleventh and the thirteenth centuries. The oldest surviving member of these historiographical processes is the *Gesta Hungarorum* (Deeds of Hungarians), written and compiled by Master Simon of Kéza ca. 1285, during the reign of King Ladislas IV (1272–90). He is the first Hungarian historian whose name we know for certain. Since only an excerpt of his chronicle has survived, we must use later texts to reconstruct the complete (or at least more detailed) version. During the Angevin Era, the literate clericals produced two groups of the chronicle-composition. First, an unknown Franciscan friar of Buda constructed a text when King Charles I (1301–42) ruled Hungary, and as the continuance of his work was later printed in Buda in 1473, this circle of the text is named the *Chronicle of Buda*. In the time of King Louis I (1342–82), a longer history was compiled. It began to be written on May 15, 1358, and I cited the introduction has above. It was attributed to Márk of Kált, a cleric of the royal court and the canon warden of the Royal Basilica in Székesfehérvár. The most representative copy of his work is the codex of the *Illuminated Chronicle*.<sup>20</sup>

Recording the ancient tradition: it cannot be simplified to a linear process because of an “irregular actor.” An anonymous author, Master P., formerly the Notary of King Béla III (1172–96), wrote his *Gesta Hungarorum* on “the genealogy of the kings of Hungary and of their noblemen” (“*genealogiam regum Hungariae et nobilium suorum*”) in the early 1200s.<sup>21</sup> The most important difficulties from the perspective of our inquiry can be summarized as follows: the Anonymous Notary and Simon of Kéza both read the older chronicles or gestas, Simon of Keza adopted parts from the Anonymous Notary, and some fragments of their additions got into the *corpus* of the *Illuminated Chronicle*.<sup>22</sup>

19 Horváth, *Árpád-kori latinnyelvű irodalmunk*, 305–15.

20 Dercsényi, “The Illuminated Chronicle and its Period,” 22–23; Szovák, “L’historiographie hongroise à l’époque arpadienne,” 375–84; Veszprémy, “The Illuminated Chronicle,” 11–36. Conf. with the earlier secondary literature e. g. Hóman, *A Szent László-kori Gesta Ungarorum*; Gerics, *Legkorábbi gestaszerkesztéseink*; Kristó, *A történeti irodalom Magyarországon*.

21 Rady and Veszprémy, *Anonymus and Master Roger*, 2–3.

22 Veszprémy, “The Illuminated Chronicle,” 31.

According to the chronology of the surviving histories, we have to look into the *Gesta Hungarorum* written by the Anonymous Notary. His prologue contains relevant data, as he explains the aim of his work, which is to narrate:

how the seven leading persons (*VII principales persone*), who are called the *Hetumoger*, came down from the Scythian land, what that Scythian land was like, and how prince Álmos was begotten and why Álmos, from whom the kings of Hungary trace their origin, is called the first prince of Hungary, and how many realms and rulers they conquered and why the people coming forth from the Scythian land are called Hungarians in the speech of foreigners but Magyars in their own (*in sua lingua propria Mogerii vocatur*).<sup>23</sup>

The anonymous author shows here an adequate awareness to draw a distinction between the external and vernacular forms. In his prologue, the phrase *Hetumoger* (“seven Hungarians”) was used in a political sense to refer to the seven highest leaders (who chose one of their own as a monarch), but without a number, the noun *Moger* refers to the whole speech community. Unfortunately, his explanations were distorted by scholastic explications and (mis)interpretations, as the following example illustrates:

Scythia is then a very great land called *Dentumoger*... On its eastern side, neighboring Scythia, were the peoples Gog and Magog (*fuertunt gentes Gog et Magog*), whom Alexander the Great had walled in... The first king of Scythia was Magog, son of Japhet, and this people were called after him Magyar (*gens illa a Magog rege vocata est Moger*).<sup>24</sup>

This error is the result of the mixing of different traditions. Medieval histories shared an essential characteristic feature: the authors had to integrate stories of the *origo gentis* into the Biblical tradition. In this case, Moger’s name was similar to Magog, who appears on the one hand as the second son of Japheth (Gen 10,2) and, on the other, with Gog as a warrior in Satan’s army (Revelations 20,7). The Biblical etymologies of the ethnonyms were elaborated by Isidore of Seville (†636), the last of the Fathers of the Church. With regards to our case, we read, “Magog, from whom people think the Scythians and the Goths took their origin.”<sup>25</sup>

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23 Anonymous, *Gesta Hungarorum*, 2–3.

24 Ibid., 4–7.

25 *The Etymologies of Isidore of Seville*, 193.



It is a little ironic that the phrase *Hetumoger* itself was criticized some decades later. Soon after the seven captains of the conquering Hungarians were enumerated, the text of the chronicle from the Angevin Era contains the following:

The other clans, who by descent were of equal standing with those of the captains, made their dwelling-places wherever seemed good to them. When therefore it is said in some chronicles that the aforesaid seven captains entered Pannonia and alone settled and populated Hungary, whence come the clans of Akus, Bor, Aba and other noble Hungarians since none of these were strangers but had all come forth from Scythia. They adduce no other reason than that it is common to speak of the seven Hungarians. If the Hungarians numbered only these seven with their families, and not numerous families with their wives, sons, daughters, servants and maids, is it possible that these seven should take possession of the kingdom? It is impossible.<sup>26</sup>

The scholars attribute this argumentation to Ákos of the clan Ákos, a noble clerical in the court of King Stephen V (1270–72).<sup>27</sup> His gesta-continuation did not survive in its original form. A few fragments of his work were incorporated into the chronicles during the process of composition. Ákos offers another explanation concerning the meaning of the “seven Hungarian,” but his reasoning did not result in a positive solution. On the contrary, his etymology is quite tragic and contains nothing that might be characterized as glorious. In the time of Great Prince Toxun (ca. 950–72), a Hungarian army was defeated in Thuringia and the Duke of Saxony killed all its warriors. Only seven Hungarians were left alive. The duke ordered that their ears be cut off and sent home to tell of the fate of their military campaign. Since these seven Hungarians chose life without pride and chose not to be killed with the others, they were deprived of all their property and were separated from their families. These mutilated survivors were sentenced to go begging from tent to tent. There is an important difference between the two groups of chronicles when they name the seven beggars. The *Chronicle of Buda* calls them “het Mogor/Magyar and Gok/Gyak” (a corrupted version of “seven mourning Hungarians”), but in the *Illuminated Chronicle* one finds the word “Lazari.”<sup>28</sup> Ákos misunderstood the old concept

26 *The Hungarian Illuminated Chronicle*, 100.

27 Mályusz, *Az V. István-kori gesta*.

28 *The Hungarian Illuminated Chronicle*, 100. Conf. Szentpétery, *Scriptores Rerum Hungaricarum*, vol. 1, 294.

of “seven Hungarians,” as he thought that these seven people were the people who became the forefathers of the Hungarian elite. Actually, in the earlier records he was not considered kin to the seven leading Hungarian clans. Thus, the misinterpretation was completed with the injured vanity of a nobleman with pure “Scythian” origins. Since the Anonymous Notary and Master Ákos represented both aspects of the Hungarian aristocracy, the traces of wider and deeper historical interest can be found in other texts with further relevant data.

The oldest version of the Hungarian ethnic origin-myth was written by Simon of Kéza. The story of the wonderful deer begins with an obligatory Biblical influence but continues as an authentic ethnic origin-myth. So, the giant Ménrót (*Menrot gigans*) – son of Thana of the seed of Japheth – “entered the land of Havilah (*terram Euilath*), which is now called Persia, and there begot two sons, *Hunor* and *Mogor*, by his wife Eneth.”<sup>29</sup> One day, the brothers went hunting in the Meotis marshes, and they began to pursue a deer, but it disappeared out of sight. Hunor and Mogor saw that the land was well suited for grazing cattle, so they asked their father’s permission to move into the Meotis marshes, which bordered their Persian homeland. They entered the Meotis marshes and remained there for five years. In the sixth year, they came out and discovered the wives and children of the sons of Belar, and the brothers seized them. Two daughters of Dula, prince of the Alans, were also seized. Hunor married one of them, Mogor the other, and all Huns were the descendants of these women. They remained in the marshes, and they grew into a very powerful people, and the land was not large enough to contain or feed them.<sup>30</sup>

The myth appeared in the fourteenth-century chronicles, too. The *Chronicle of Buda* contains onomastic forms similar to Kéza’s: the giant Nemproth, Eneth, and their sons Hunor and Mogor, “from whom the Huns or the Hungarians descended (*ex quibus Huni sive Hungari sunt egressi*).” The *Illuminated Chronicle* changes Nemproth into Magor/Magog [!], because Nemproth was the son of Chus, who was the son of Cham, the damned son of Noah (Gen 10, 6–8). Avoiding the disgraceful ancestry and returning to the strict genealogy of Japheth, Márk of Kált replaced Nemproth with Magor/Magog, and this Magog, Japheth’s second son, “upon his wife Enee begat Magor and Hunor, after whom the Magyars and the Huns are named (*ex coniuge sua Enee genuit Magor et Hunor, a quo Magari et Huni sunt nominati*).”<sup>31</sup>

29 Simonis de Kéza: *Gesta Hungarorum*, 12–15.

30 Ibid., 14–17.

31 Szentpétery, *Scriptores*, vol 1, 247–50. Conf. *The Hungarian Illuminated Chronicle*, 90.

Continuing the story, as Hunor's and Magor's descendants became a mighty nation (*gens validissima*), they had to seek new lands, so they sent scouts to Scythia to explore its land, and when they received the good news, they decided to move there with their children and their herds.<sup>32</sup>

Framing the geographical conditions of Scythia, the name Magyar appears in another function. Simon of Kéza gave us this enigmatic description:

In fact, the Scythian realm has a single border, but administratively it is divided into three kingdoms, namely Barsatia, Dencia, and Mogoria. (*Sciticum enim regnum comprehensione una cingitur, sed in regna tria dividitur principando, scilicet in Barsatiam, Denciam et Mogoriam.*) As well, it has 108 districts (*provincias*) representing 108 families (*progenies*), which were divided among the sons of Hunor and Mogor long ago, when they invaded Scythia.<sup>33</sup>

The three “kingdoms” are mentioned in the latter chronicles of the Angevin Era as *Bascardia*, *Dencia* (or in its misread form, *Bencia*), and *Magoria/Mogoria*.<sup>34</sup> Comparing this tradition with the *Gesta Hungarorum* by Anonymous, we find a significant difference: his Scythia is equal with *Dentumoger* which seems to have two components (*Dentu* ~ *Dencia*? and *Moger* ~ *Mogoria/Magoria*) confronting the image of a tripartite Scythia (*Barsatia/Bascardia*, *Dencia* and *Mogoria/Magoria*) found in the chronicles. The version of the “three kingdoms of Scythia” probably contains the primordial tradition.<sup>35</sup> However, the geographical function of the noun Magyar appears again in the chronicles, but in a more antinomic situation. The second entry of the Hungarians in Pannonia begins with the origin-myth of the ruling dynasty, when in the ancient land Eleud from Eunodbilia begat a son named Álmos (Almus). The place of his birth was “Magor” according to the *Chronicle of Buda*, but according to the *Illuminated Chronicle*, it was “Scythia.”<sup>36</sup>

As we can see, the noun *Magor* appeared in following mythical and historical roles: forefather of the Magyars, denominator of a leading clan and an ethnic community, and toponym referring to a homeland, from where the Hungarians came and occupied the Carpathian Basin. The most problematic function is the

32 Simonis de Kéza, *Gesta Hungarorum*, 18–19; *The Hungarian Illuminated Chronicle*, 91. Conf. Szentpétery, *Scriptores*, vol 1, 146, 252.

33 Simonis de Kéza, *Gesta Hungarorum*, 22–23.

34 Szentpétery, *Scriptores*, vol. 1, 253.

35 Szabados, “Szkítia három tartománya,” 285–301.

36 “Eleud filius Vgeg ex filia Eunodbilia in Magor/Scythia genuit filium, qui nominatur Almus...” Szentpétery, *Scriptores*, vol 1, 284.

last one, because in its case the contradictions did not arise from a disturbing influence caused by two different traditions, as was the case with the similarity of two personal names, the original Hungarian Magor and the Biblical Magog. On contrary, the incoherence of the toponyms remained within the circle of the native written tradition. Thus Magor (and its variations) occurred in three situations: 1) it meant the whole of Scythia (*Magor* in the *Chronicle of Buda, Scythia* in the *Illuminated Chronicle*, Chapter 26); 2) it meant half of Scythia, if *Dentumoger* in the *Gesta Hungarorum* by the Anonymous Notary (Chapter 1, 3, 5) is composed of *Dentu* ~ *Dencia*? and *Moger* ~ *Mogoria/Magoria*; and 3) it meant one-third of Scythia, since it was enumerated among its three kingdoms (*Barsatia/Bascardia*, *Dencia*, and *Mogoria/Magoria* in the *Gesta Hungarorum* by Simon of Kéza, Chapter 6, the *Chronicle of Buda*, and the *Illuminated Chronicle*, Chapter 6).<sup>37</sup> Two circumstances may explain this kind of dubiousness or inconsistency: the complicated and often uncertain relationships of the early Hungarian historiography, which I briefly discussed above, and the fact that the toponymical function of this noun is secondary to its role as an ethnonym.

Thus, Magor appeared primarily as a forefather of the Magyars, i.e. the denominating ancestor of the whole ethnic community. However, this phenomenon is not so simple and clear, and we cannot claim to have found a satisfying and unambiguous answer. First, we have to face the fact that the role of the mythical forefather has been duplicated. How did Hunor become part of this story? Was he an original character, or did he become part of the myth later? From the philological point of view, Gyula Moravcsik thought the second alternative more realistic. According to Moravcsik, Magor's mythical companion was the result of a misreading of a phrase: the author of the *Ancient Gesta* read “*Hunorum rex*” in an abbreviated form “*Hunor[um] rex*,” and he was led astray by the absence of the *-um* plural genitive ending, so he transformed the Hun ethnonym into a character and created the ancestor of the Huns.<sup>38</sup> However, this argumentation cannot be supported by the comparative ethnology. Attila Mátéffy emphasized that the sub-feature of two brothers can basically be found in the origin myths of the Turkic peoples.<sup>39</sup> Forasmuch the language of the myth cannot be entirely translated into the language of the history, we have to recognize that forcing their “confrontation” cannot result an unambiguous

37 Szentpétery, *Scriptores*, vol 1., 34, 38, 39, 146, 253, 284.

38 Moravcsik, *Muagerisz*, 265.

39 Mátéffy, “The Hind as the Ancestress,” 944–45.



answer to the question raised above. E.g. Muageris was a king of the Huns, and he had a brother, but his brother's name was Gordas, and they became enemies.

Although myth and history should not be mixed, we cannot separate them hermetically, as both consist of texts referring to the basis of a common identity. Mihály Hoppál's statement on the nexus of these two phenomena is worth citing:

The folklore texts, thus the texts of myths, are the 'long-term memory of culture'... an ethnic community can from time to time repeat the past, the history of the origin things, the world, and the group itself, i.e. its prehistorical history. Myths intermediate between the two. Therefore, the investigation of myths of mythological systems may indirectly be employed to draw conclusions concerning prehistory.<sup>40</sup>

## *Conclusion*

Considering all mentioned data and used methodologies, we can participate in the investigation of the connection between Muageris, the historical king of the Huns, and Magor, the mythical ancestor of the Hungarians. It must be emphasized again and again that there are many complexities and ambiguities which nourish a sense of uncertainty, including the lack of data, the diverse functions of the nouns, and the diverse forms of the names. It is worth noting that the names Magor, Moger, Muageris etc. are found in strange linguistic milieus. From the perspective of the Byzantine historians, the name of the Hun king was basically an external proper noun, and although the name "Magyar" was a vernacular word for the Hungarian chroniclers, they wrote their works in Latin using letters with foreign origins to record this name, and both the Greek and the Latin texts were transcribed several times, thus there were several occasions to misunderstand and miswrite the words. Nevertheless, to the question of whether the name of King Muageris is closely connected to the "Magyar" ethnonym my answer is yes. And there is one more argument which merits mention and which offers further persuasive evidence in support of this conclusion: the historical (King Muageris) and the mythical (Magor) settings are the same: the northern region of the Black Sea and the Sea of Azov. Thus, we have evidence not only from the field of onomastics, but also from the perspective of geography. Moreover, this similarity is found in sources which were unquestionably independent, since the

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40 Hoppál, "Myth: Image and Text," 69, 80.

Byzantine authors and the Hungarian chroniclers were separated by space, time, and language. Therefore, the figure of Magor could retain at least the influence of the memory of King Muageris. Drawing on Reinhard Wenskus' convincingly elaborated theory on the "seed of tradition" ("Traditionskern," i.e. the notion that a dominant group/elite constructs the highest political unity and legitimizes this process with its own origin myth, which later determines the identity of the whole community),<sup>41</sup> I offer a possible reconstruction. King Magyar (Muageris/Magor) may have been the ancestor of a clan (Meger), which more than three centuries later, under its leader Álmos, organized a steppe-state, and ultimately this ancestor became the name used to designate a whole nation.

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41 Wenskus, *Stammesbildung und Verfassung*, 54–87.

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(Formerly *Acta Historica Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae*)

4 Tóth Kálmán utca, Budapest H – 1097 Hungary

Postal address: H-1453 Budapest, P.O. Box 33. Hungary

E-mail: [hunghist@btk.mta.hu](mailto:hunghist@btk.mta.hu)

Homepage: <http://www.hunghist.org>

Published quarterly by the Institute of History,  
Research Centre for the Humanities (RCH), Hungarian Academy of Sciences (HAS).

Responsible Editor: Pál Fodor (Director General).

Prepress preparation by the Institute of History, RCH, HAS Research Assistance Team; Leader: Éva Kovács. Page layout: Imre Horváth; Cover design: Gergely Böhm.

Printed in Hungary, by Prime Rate Kft, Budapest.

Translators/proofreaders: Alan Campbell, Matthew W. Caples, Thomas Cooper, Sean Lambert.

Annual subscriptions: \$80/€60 (\$100/€75 for institutions), postage excluded.

For Hungarian institutions HUF7900 per year, postage included.

Single copy \$25/€20. For Hungarian institutions HUF2000.

Send orders to *The Hungarian Historical Review*, H-1453 Budapest, P.O. Box 33. Hungary; e-mail: [hunghist@btk.mta.hu](mailto:hunghist@btk.mta.hu).

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